

**WorkFirst High Performance Bonus Proposal**  
**Innovation Project**  
**2002 Nomination Form**  
**Workshops for 6-Monthers**

Local Planning Area: Asotin/Garfield/Whitman Counties

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Workbooks and outlines of the described workshops available on request.

## **1. Describe your project.**

The Asotin/Garfield/Whitman project is a series of workshops targeted to clients who have been on WorkFirst for 6 or more months. We are giving a strong message to clients that 6 months is a long time to be on TANF. Partners and Case Managers may also refer other clients they feel might benefit from the workshops.

Identification of barriers and then addressing those barriers is a key to success in moving people into self-sufficiency. The workshops do this. At this time, we are rotating people through six workshops, replacing workshop topics as necessary. Clients attend at least one workshop per month, but may be added to more as available. We have at least two workshops scheduled per month. The partners meet once per month (Workweb) to review local cases and to make recommendations for workshops. The Workweb includes line staff from CSD, ESD, Rural Resources, Walla Walla Community College, YWCA, Rogers Counseling, Genesis Counseling, and Asotin Housing Authority. Other agencies may attend as they request or as necessary.

We have had a total of 224 participants in the workshop. Most clients have attended more than one workshop. About 1/4<sup>th</sup> of the clients leave TANF following participation in 1 or 2 workshops.

We pay a flat fee of \$500.00 per workshop, with the exception of the Job Preparation Workshop, which is provided free of charge. This price includes all materials. We include lunch as a way to keep the participants into the afternoon and to allow a time for them to get to know their case managers and partners. We also give small gift certificates to those who complete the workshops as recognition to their participation.

The workshops address several TANF issues, including movement from job search or part-time employment to fulltime employment, client accountability, and community jobs placements.

## **2. What makes this project innovative?**

A key message included in the workshops is that 6 months is a long time for a person to be dependent on TANF for all of his or her financial needs. They need to be seriously looking at their true barriers to self-sufficiency. They (and others) may tell themselves that they aren't working because they aren't able to locate employment. This is not accurate. They reason they are not working is more involved than that and the workshops help them address other issues they may have, such as problems with their families, lack of education, lack of soft-skills (such as getting along with people), and self-esteem issues.

The project started as a single assessment workshop for long-term clients. The initial workshop included drug and alcohol assessments, literacy assessments, and domestic violence training. We found that the number of clients with the issues assessed was very high, and we needed to work with these issues much earlier in order to move clients into employment and eventual self-sufficiency. Additional follow-up

was needed and we needed to learn more about why clients were on assistance for long periods of time. We needed this information early in their time on TANF to give appropriate time to get them the help needed to move off of assistance. We added more workshops as needs became known. We also wanted another avenue for keeping in contact with clients. This gives us the opportunity. If someone is scheduled for a workshop and they do not appear, they are called by a case manager THAT MORNING to find out why. We are making it very difficult for anyone to “fade” into the system. If they don’t participate, they are confronted immediately. They are forced to actively, rather than passively, deal with their actions in WorkFirst.

While the workshops are client-focused, we gained much of the information needed to determine what types of workshops were needed from employers. We have very little trouble helping clients get employed, but our clients were having trouble keeping their jobs. We found that clients were losing employment due to problems with soft-skills– not showing up for work due to issues at home, not getting along with supervisors, co-workers, or customers, etc. The workshops help us to identify these issues at an early point.

This project simplifies the program by identifying issues and barriers early. The case managers and the partners do not have to “guess” at the issues, and the clients don’t have to go through multiple job losses before they and we are aware of self-sufficiency barriers. Because we engage experts in assessments, the process of identifying barriers is simplified for the case managers and partners.

We measure the success of the project by the number of clients who leave TANF and stay off TANF because their needs have been successfully addressed.

Our current workshops are as follows:

- A. Assessment Workshop– Provided by Rogers Counseling Center and Whitman County Assessment, Walla Walla Community College, and YWCA– In this workshop, participants are assessed for substance abuse issues, literacy level, and are given information on domestic violence issues, substance abuse, and available education at the local college. We have had several participants contact the YWCA for assistance in addressing abuse issues following their participation in this workshop.
- B. Resiliency WorkShop– Provided by Genesis– Participants are assessed for interpersonal skills and receive training on how to get along with others on the job and in personal situations.
- C. Esteem WorkShop– Provided by Rainier Services– This is an emotional workshop that really forces clients to look at themselves and how their decisions and actions determine how they live. This workshop starts with clients taking a harsh look at themselves and does not allow them to passively participate. While many of the participants have a very hard time with the first half of the workshop, they see the training pulled together in the second half, dedicated to building esteem and showing them their strengths. This workshop has consistently gotten high praise from the participants, yet it is probably the most emotionally charged in our series.

- D. Job Skills Workshop– Provided by Rural Resources– Participants learn more about how to locate and keep employment. This has been especially helpful as we are now down to one ESD staff person to address all ESD/WorkFirst issues for Clarkston, Colfax, and Pullman and is therefore not available to offer extensive services in this area.
- E. Healthy Relationships WorkShop– Provided by the YWCA– We are expecting to begin to offer this beginning in December 2002. It will include additional information and assessment on interpersonal skills and building the skills necessary to recognize good and bad relationships (work and personal), recognizing and identifying appropriate behavior in the workplace, and contributing to healthy relationships. This will also include a support group for those who wish to continue in a group.
- F. Job Support Group– provided by Rural Resources– We expect to begin this workshop in October or November 2002. This will include those who have begun to work or are in intensive job search. Our clients have little trouble locating employment, but we have several who have trouble keeping it. The newness wears off and they feel bored, family or personal life is disrupted and they have a hard time dealing with that, the changes they were expecting with employment don't meet their expectations, they don't get along with others in the workplace, etc. This workshop series/ support group will help them deal with the issues they have while maintaining employment. The group will meet weekly.

### **3. Partnerships**

All partners were involved in the design of this project. We are all experiencing loss of resources and cannot spend time guessing at the barriers experienced by our mutual clients. We need to get the facts.

Whitman County Counseling and Rogers Counseling provides the substance abuse assessment, YWCA for domestic violence and relationships issues, ESD and Rural Resources for employment services and support group to ensure that clients retain and maintain employment, Genesis for anger management. Transportation is available from Valley Transit. Genesis has become a valuable partner in this project and we look forward to increasing their participation.

All of the agencies involved in this project are providing training and assessments at less than the rates that they would normally charge. They have created new ways of delivering services to groups as a result of the needs of our program and available resources.

We have always enjoyed strong partnerships, but this project has expanded our partnership and has allowed more ownership by partners in the success of the WorkFirst local program.